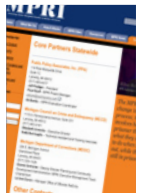


THE MICHIGAN PRISONER REENTRY INITIATIVE: CREATING SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS AND BETTER CITIZENS

Click on listing



The local Steering Team remains the decision-making body within the local governance structure with four Co-Chairs as leaders, representing the Administrative Agency, the MDOC Field Operations Administration, the MDOC Correctional Facilities Administration, and the local community Advisory Council. This revised structure was

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MPRI: getting ready to go home

Contributing writer: Lynda White

When we teach a person to read, we give them the chance to find a meaningful job, to read to their child, and even to have a dream for the future. Cynthia Follen, MPRI Facility Coordinator at Pugsley Correctional Facility, recently shared this story about a prisoner who was exempt from taking the GED for parole due to a learning disability but felt he needed the math and reading skills required to pass the GED to be successful in the community.

Walking Out the Door a Better Man

Follen said, “When Mr. Smith* came into our program, he could not read very well and was not sure he would be able to complete all the classes, but he was willing to try.” “I assigned him to one of the MPRI tutors, Mr. Sherman. When Mr. Smith started in the tutoring program, he had a third grade reading level and could not read a full sentence fluently. The day before he paroled, he read a full page of the bible to me. He made no mistakes and read beautifully; it truly was amazing.”

Follen said the best part is that Mr. Smith was able to read a book to his 10-year-old daughter during a visit. It was the first time he had ever read to his daughter and he remarked how he had never felt so proud. “We helped make a difference in this man’s life,” Follen stated. “He said that he knows he can go to college now. It was always a dream for him, but for the first time in his life, he has a goal worth working toward.” “‘I am walking out the door tomorrow a smarter man in many different ways,’ he told me.” said Follen. “He was grateful and wanted me to thank everyone who helped him.”

The MPRI Tutoring Program

This prisoner was part of the MPRI Tutoring Program at Pugsley Correctional Facility. The facility staff identified a need to provide tutoring so MPRI prisoners could complete the evidence-based programs designed to give prisoners the tools they need to be successful in the community.

The program began in March 2006 with one tutor and about 20 prisoners who voluntarily chose to attend tutoring to build math and reading skills. It has grown to 120 prisoners, one full-time tutor, and four to five prisoner volunteers who work one-on-one tutoring prisoners daily.

The MPRI Fosters Cooperation

The tutoring program highlights the effect the MPRI has had on changing the goals of prison employees. The primary focus of the staff used to be to make sure prisoners did not break rules. But now the job includes the additional focus of preparing prisoners for a successful parole so they do not return to prison. Gaining basic educational skills is a critical element of that preparation, and the staff work with prisoners to make this happen.



“The MPRI Tutoring Program would not be successful without the cooperation of the staff,” said prisoner volunteer tutor Mr. Sherman. “They can see the prisoner voluntarily going for help to better himself. Seeing prisoners who want to better themselves and being a part of that improvement brings job satisfaction to staff members and the MPRI tutors.”

Looking to the Future

Mr. Smith has now been paroled for over four months, and the tutoring program has had an immediate impact on his success in the community. The math tutoring he received from Mr. Sherman taught him metric measurements that gave him the knowledge to get a job repairing snowmobiles. Without that tutoring, he would not have been able to read and understand the manuals. Not only does Mr. Smith have a job, he has passed all his drug tests and is determined to pass the GED so he can go to college and start his own business repairing snowmobiles.

Thanks to the work of MPRI tutors, Mr. Smith has his eye on a better future – not looking back at his past.

* Smith is a fictitious name to protect the prisoner’s identity

Grand Rapids Community Foundation Receives JEHT Foundation Challenge Grant

Contributing writer:
Lynda White

In an effort to encourage community foundations in Michigan to work with the MPRI, the JEHT Foundation approved a challenge grant to match funds committed by community foundations.

The match will be \$1 for \$1 for funds committed to re-entry programming in local communities. The Grand Rapids Community Foundation is the first community foundation to apply for and receive this grant. Their award from the JEHT Foundation is for \$200,000. The grant money will cover legal aid and workforce development for returning prisoners. "We are pleased to receive the matching grant from the JEHT Foundation," said Laurie Craft, Program Director at Grand Rapids Community Foundation. "The Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative is in line with many of our strategic priorities and this is a great way for us to leverage our dollars in the community."

The JEHT Foundation Challenge Grant allows Grand Rapids Community Foundation to Award Two Grants

GRANT ONE: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Re-entry Employment Resource Center (RERC), a nonprofit organization developed from the Re-entry Roundtable of Kent County, received grant money to implement a workforce development model. Working with 100 individuals, they will enhance workforce development access, skills development—both inside and outside of prison/jail—and employment retention opportunities for former prisoners. The service delivery model incorporates a seamless transition from prison or jail to the community, as well as a balanced emphasis on life skills, life planning, job skills, suitable job acquisition, and retention. "By creating job attachment and job retention, we will reach our intended outcomes of increasing public safety, reducing costs of the criminal justice system by decreasing recidivism, strengthening families, and strengthening neighborhoods and the community," said Penny Pestle, The Delta Strategy Technical Assistant for the RERC. The new RERC will ensure that all of these elements are coordinated for maximum impact on the lives of the participants and for our communities.

"While the MPRI does fund workforce development, this grant will fill in gaps in the funding to link areas like housing, transportation, and child care needs so the former prisoner can get a job and stay employed," said Pestle.

Reducing Crime

Reducing barriers to housing and employment are key to reducing recidivism and building safer communities. These programs will support other MPRI efforts in Kent County to provide a seamless transition to the community. "We are very excited about these services. These programs will help former prisoners become effective citizens and reduce crime and the costs of crime for our community," said Yvonne Jackson, Kent County MPRI Community Coordinator.

For more information on the JEHT Foundation Challenge Grant, please visit the MPRI Web site at michpri.com and click "Re-entry Funders and Community Foundations."

Visit the Michigan Reentry Law & Reentry Law Project Wiki Web site. This Web site was developed by Legal Aid of Western Michigan under the grant to provide information and assistance on re-entry. <http://reentry.mplp.org>

GRANT TWO: LEGAL ASSISTANCE

The nonprofit Legal Aid of Western Michigan received a one-year grant to assist with removing legal barriers to employment and housing for inmates re-entering the community. This funding will allow Legal Aid to continue to expand the services, outreach, and advocacy they provide as part of an effort known as the "Reentry Law Project." The Reentry Law Project seeks to assist people with criminal records to overcome legal barriers to re-entry into the community in such areas as employment, housing, and child support debt.

"The grant allows us to help individuals with specific legal problems impacting their reentry," said Miriam Aukerman, Reentry Law Project Director at Legal Aid of Western Michigan. "We are working closely with parole officers and the Kent County MPRI Community Coordinator to identify individuals that need legal help, all with the intent of building better citizens and safer neighborhoods," added Aukerman.





Above: Screen captures from sections of the new site—which also includes streaming video clips.

New MPRI Web Site Is Just A Click Away

Contributing writer: Lynda White

Public Policy Associates, Incorporated (PPA) has launched the new MPRI Web site (www.michpri.com). “The new Web site will be a great tool to ensure that the most up-to-date and comprehensive information on the Initiative is available to Michigan residents,” says Paul Elam, MPRI Project Manager at PPA. “It does an excellent job conveying the central tenets of the Initiative in a targeted way,” Elam says.

Contains Links and Information for Members of the Local Communities

The new site, www.michpri.com, contains links and information for members of the local communities that will be impacted by the MPRI, re-entry programming funders, community foundations, members of the justice system, researchers and evaluators, and policy makers.

User-Friendly and Accessible

Visitors to the site can now download key MPRI information, including the brochure on the Initiative, the overview documents, up-to-date research and statistics, and specific issue briefs, at any time. “One of our goals with the redesign of the site was to ensure that it was user-friendly and accessible,” Elam says. The site also offers links to the Web sites of state departments that are involved in the implementation of the Initiative.

Local Contact Information as well as Statewide

Because the MPRI has local as well as statewide implications, the site includes contact information that will make it possible for the public to “get local”

by getting involved with and becoming aware of the MPRI in their communities.

Pivotal Importance of Information Being Available

“Making information on the MPRI readily available is one of the keys to bringing about an understanding of what it is and what it means to the communities that will be affected. Having a Web site that is designed to make that information easily accessible is a pivotal step in that process,” says Robb Burroughs, the technical assistance and training director of the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency.

Site Will Continue to Have New Content Added – to Remain Current and Fresh

More content will be added to the Web site regularly over the course of the next fiscal year to improve communications and planning among state and local MPRI partners. Please forward your questions, comments, or recommendations to michpri@publicpolicy.com.

Useful contact information & links

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Visit our website at www.michpri.com